**Week 5 - Instructor Guidance**

**BUS692: WEEK FIVE Guidance**

**Conflicting Human Resources**

**Case Analysis (This is nothing you have to turn in, just fun and thought provoking. Feel free to refer to cases on this week’s discussion board.)**

**A.**   **How Can Your Company Help Employees Balance Work and Family Commitments?**

You are the Human Resource Department at a large Health Maintenance Organization.  A number of employees at various levels of the organization (both men and women) have asked about the opportunity to work part-time when they begin their families.  The president of the HMO wants you to come up with a company policy for dealing with requests for temporarily going part-time for this purpose.

 Your group of human resource experts must decide what this policy should be.  You should consider:

1.      What type of policy is feasible for your company?

a.   Is going part-time even an option?  Why or why not? For all workers or just for some?  For how long?  What constitutes part-time?

b.   Should you consider two tracks for employees (e.g., career-primary vs. career and family)?  If so, at what point do employees have to choose their track -- when they first are employed by the HMO or when they decide to have a family?  What problems might arise from such a two-track system?

2.      Based on your policy...

a.   how would the company benefit?

b.   how would employees benefit?

c.   what are possible costs to the company and to employees?

Your group of human resource experts may not agree on the best policy for your company.  If this is the case then you should try to compromise.  One strategy might be to set priorities for the programs based on maximizing benefits to the company and the workers while minimizing costs.

**B. An Experimental Workplace Participation Program**

In this exercise you will enact a situation that might confront a workplace participation program.  The goal of the exercise is to give you first-hand experience in the problems and possibilities of such programs through role playing.

The setting and the situation are described below.  The role playing exercise enacts a participation program meeting.  First, meet informally in smaller groups (2 to 3 people), and then in the larger formal meeting (9 people).  In playing out its role each group should think about its own goals and strategies, and, equally important, should attempt to "take the role of the other."  That is, in order to play your own role you must take into account the probable reactions of other groups to your approach.  Remember, at the formal participation program meeting you must arrive at a working consensus if a solution to the current problem is to be reached and if the program is to continue, so other groups' reactions are extremely important to you.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

International Control Corporation (ICC) initiated a participation program at its Bloomington, Indiana, plant to help alleviate problems of absenteeism, turnover, and "bad work attitudes."  Essentially, the plan allows groups of workers to make changes in their work arrangements, subject to review by a committee made up of management, union, and shop-floor representatives of the work group.  The plan was not written up as a formal agreement, but was agreed to on an experimental basis by Local #396 of the Wage Earners Union (WEU).  Both sides agreed that the program would b informal to maintain flexibility and that any party could terminate the experiment at any time.  The plan has been experimentally implemented in the Finishing Department of the plant with the unanimous consent of all ten employees in the department.

The participation program enjoys widespread support among workers throughout the plant, and in particular, among workers in the Finishing Department.  The employees in the Finishing Department are a close-knit group whose friendship extends to after work activities.  These employees and other workers in the plant are displeased over management's history of speed-ups, arbitrary supervision, and delayed grievances.  They are also displeased with the union to some extent.  Many workers are upset by the union's apparent lack of aggressiveness in pursuing grievances for non-union employees.  New equipment was recently installed in the main production area.  No layoffs have occurred during the installation and implementation period.  However, employees throughout the plant are concerned about possible layoffs in the future.

I.C.C.'s contract with the W.E.U. recognizes the W.E.U. as the sole representative of all production and maintenance employees in the plant.  The contract also includes provisions for a standard grievance procedure, under which disciplinary actions are grievable issues.  Seventy-two percent of the workers in the plant are union members; the rest pay a "fair-share" fee to the union to cover the costs of negotiations, grievances, etc., since the union is required by law to represent the entire bargaining unit.  In the Finishing Department, seven of the ten workers are union members.

Although the company has tried to decertify the union twice during the
last ten years, relations have been slowly improving.  Current relations are cool, but functional.  Workers throughout the plant have repeatedly complained of the arbitrary decisions made by their supervisors, but there have been no work stoppages or other direct actions.

THE IMMEDIATE PROBLEM

Ben Mason was late to work for three straight days.  Ben is a skilled worker in the Finishing Department and his tardiness prevented his shift from beginning operations (the shift starts at 7:00 a.m.).  On the first day he was ten minutes late, on the second day he was twenty minutes late, and on the third day he was six minutes late.  Mason is considered a good employee, but has five previous warnings for tardiness and two for insubordination in his file (collected over the four years he has been employed at the plant).

On the second day Mason was warned by the departmental supervisor not to come in late again or he would be disciplined.  Mason stated that he would try, but that he had a newborn at home that kept him awake at nights.  On the third day Mason was warned that he would be suspended if he was late again, to which he responded by cursing the supervisor.  The supervisor warned him that he was being insubordinate, and that that too was subject to disciplinary action.  Upon arriving at work the next morning, Mason was given a six-month suspension without pay by the departmental supervisor for tardiness.  Mason asked his union representative to file a grievance over his suspension (Ben is not a union member).  The representative later informed him that the union would not file the grievance.  The union felt that since Mason had been properly warned by the supervisor that a grievance had a very low likelihood of success.  Mason decided not to file the grievance himself, but complained of the matter to his co-workers.  They unanimously decided to call a participation program meeting to discuss the issue.  The workers maintain that since they are to make decisions relative to their conditions of employment, they should be allowed to discipline the members of their group.  And now, let us meet and try to resolve this issue.

Cases adapted from: Hodson, R. and Sullivan, T. (2012). The social organization of work. 1st ed. Belmont: Wadsworth Pub. Co.